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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: SDVIZHKOV RELEASED AFTER COURT COMMUTES SENTENCE

REF: A. MINSK 051

[1](#)B. MINSK 120 (AND PREVIOUS)

[1](#)C. 06 MINSK 305

[1](#)D. MINSK 079

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (U) Belarus' Supreme Court on February 22 commuted independent journalist Aleksandr Sdvizhkov's sentence for reprinting the infamous cartoons of Mohammed (ref A) from three years to time served. The court cited Sdvizhkov's health concerns -- on February 21 he was moved to a prison hospital in connection with eyesight problems -- and the poor health of the journalist's mother as the bases for its decision to commute the sentence.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The two Muslim community leaders who had originally pressed charges failed to exercise their right to be present at the hearing, which was closed to the general public. One previously told media he did not feel Sdvizhkov should have served any jail time.

[1](#)3. (C) Aleksey Korol, the editor of the since closed (ref C) paper that published the cartoons, told Acting Pol/Econ Chief that it would have been too much for the regime to completely overturn the sentence. According to Korol, after several previous releases of political prisoners (ref B), the GOB likely fears being seen as weak. The quick ruling on the appeal, just like that in the case of Artur Finkevich (ref D), underscores the lack of judicial independence. Ambassador will seek to meet Sdvizhkov to hear his views on his imprisonment and release firsthand.

STEWART